

Castro Seeks Relief

By WILLIAM R. FRYE
Special to The Star

SANTIAGO, Cuba.—Fidel Castro celebrates here today the 11th anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Fortress at which he and a handful of followers launched their "crusade" to "liberate" Latin America.

Castro's "crusade" has fizzled out. It has gone sour at home and run up against increasingly effective resistance abroad.

It has brought upon Cuba a considerable degree of political and economic isolation from the hemisphere, and this isolation, in turn, has imposed austerity on the people, forced virtually total dependence on the Soviet Union, and seriously undermined Castro's personal prestige.

Late yesterday, the hemisphere was reported ready to slap Castro with a moral condemnation unprecedented in its severity, and subject him to sanctions which, if

carried out, would drastically increase his isolation.

Put Out Feelers

This is not the way Fidel planned it 11 years ago. The white horse has been shot from under him, and the foot-slogging has been hard.

It would be a mistake to conclude he is washed up, ready to throw in the towel. There is plenty of fight in him left. But he clearly would like to break out from the bind he is in, and he is groping for a way to do so.

Three times in the past four months, Castro has put out feelers toward the United States.

In March and April, Cuban diplomats began inquiring of the Spanish government informally and obliquely whether it would be available as an intermediary for discussions with Washington.

Madrid informed Washington,

but nothing came of the approaches. Both governments considered them too vague to be taken seriously.

Time for Discussion

In early July, Castro gave an interview to Richard Eder of the New York Times in which he offered to stop giving material aid to Latin American revolutionaries if the United States would withhold its help to anti-Castro Cubans.

Castro said he believed the time had come for an extensive discussion of outstanding Cuban-American issues. He indicated that an accommodation might permit him to release most of his 15,000 political prisoners and pay compensation for nationalized property.

This overall thesis—desire for talks with the United States—had been repeated here this week in the face of an incident at Guantanamo, the killing of a Cuban soldier, which could easily have been

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used to dynamite all interest in a rapprochement.

Castro has sought and obtained a sizable American sounding board for these views. On July 6 and 7, he cabled 25 influential American newspapers and magazines, inviting them to cover today's festivities. Previously it had been difficult or impossible for most American journalists to get Cuban visas.

Overture to Washington

This correspondent has been designated by several of the papers as their representative. I am not traveling at Cuban expense, nor am I accepting hospitality from the Cuban government.

These moves—the Spanish feelers, the Eder interview, and the invitation to newsmen—clearly added up to a planned and deliberate overture to Washington. While insisting that the United States must make the first move

toward an accommodation, Castro, in fact, had made it.

The United States has made no reciprocal gesture except to authorize travel by newspapermen—something it had done before, when applicants were bona fide journalists.

So far as I have been able to discover, Washington has not formulated a clear-cut policy for or against accommodation with Castro. It may not be willing to do so prior to the United States election in November.

The United States' public position is that rapprochement with Castro can take place only on three conditions:

1. That he sever his economic, military and political ties to Moscow.
2. That he halt all subversion, terrorism and incitement to revolution.
3. That he pay reasonable compensation for the American property he has seized.

These terms, however, raise as many questions as they answer.

Economy Would Collapse

Severance of Castro's ties to Moscow would mean, in effect, a kind of Cuban Titoism. It would leave Castro hanging between two worlds. Unless the western hemisphere came immediately to his rescue, his economy would collapse. Politically, Titoism could also be suicide for Fidel.

And difficult though such a demand would be for him to meet, it is by no means clear the United States would consider it sufficient. A Titoist Cuba would still be Communist and Havana would still be 90 miles from Key West.

Policy Difficulties

Unless Castro were considered to have a popular base, it would mean that Washington was acquiescing in the indefinite denial of

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self-determination to the Cuban people.

This policy is hard enough for the administration to sell to Congress and the people in the case of Yugoslavia. It would be formidably difficult to put across for Cuba. Not all officials would wish to try.

There are many, therefore, who believe the United States' stand is a device to avoid negotiations without incurring the onus for so doing.

This has been a tenable posture with Castro on the rampage, actively antagonizing and frightening other Latin governments. It may cease to be tenable if Castro continues to make gurgling noises, however muffled and ambiguous, about abandoning subversion, freeing political prisoners and paying compensation.

Even to maintain and continue strengthening hemisphere pressures on Castro, the United States may be forced to devise a more persuasive response.